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Neighbourhood Watch Community Notice

Non-Emergency contact number 101 – Emergency 999
Chichester District

Protect your Heating Fuel

Theft of heating and diesel oil has been a problem for many years and we see an increase in this type of crime whenever the price of crude oil rises. A rise in the price of fuel at the petrol pump inevitably leads to a rise in the cost of heating oil. This makes oil a more attractive proposition for the thief and they are now actively targeting fuel tanks at farms, transport depots and domestic properties. The thief may be using the oil for their own central heating or selling it on at a handsome profit. These tanks can contain thousands of pounds worth of oil and it therefore makes good sense to take a few precautions to protect them.

OFTEC (the Oil Firing Technical Association for the petroleum industry) offers advice and guidance for those who use and store oil at their premises. There are certain rules and regulations that may apply to you and OFTEC will help clarify these for you. They can be reached at www.oftec.org or by calling 0845 6585 080. They also produce 'An easy guide to domestic oil storage' which is a very straightforward and useful document.

Positioning your oil tank

The position of the tank can have a significant effect on how hard a target it is in the eyes of the thief. If the tank is close to the house, with one or more windows capable of giving a view of it, then the thief may consider the chances of being seen too high. If the tank is close to a road, path, drive or alleyway then it will be a far easier target. Hiding the tank behind the garage, shed or some other type of outbuilding is fairly commonplace, but it does give the thief the advantage.

Control switches

Control switches that control the flow of oil should be turned off and the electricity supply isolated when the tank is not in use.

Padlocks

A thief will usually come equipped with a limited range of tools to attack your tank so it's worth spending a little more on good quality locks. Close shackle padlocks are the best as they offer most resistance to the most popular of burglar tools; the bolt cropper! Due to their design, close shackle padlocks have very little of the metal hoop (shackle) exposed and bolt croppers cannot get a good grip.

Oil level gauges

Remote electronic oil level gauges are now available which will set off an audible alarm if the oil level in the tank suddenly drops or falls below a quarter full. These gauges can be located in the kitchen, or perhaps a utility room to warn of any potential problem.

Security lights

Security lights can have a very positive effect and make any property a much harder target for the thief. It's not always necessary to floodlight the area with high power beams, as a more subtle level of lighting may be all that is needed. Low energy 'dusk 'til dawn' lights positioned close to the tank should, in most cases, provide sufficient light to illuminate any suspicious activity. This type of light can be both effective and inexpensive. High powered lights can be used but care should be taken not to cause any nuisance to neighbours or road users.

Defensive planting

Defensive planting is nature's way of helping to reduce crime. Thieves will not wish to force their way through or over a prickly hedge. The smallest trace of blood or shred of ripped clothing could help the Police identify the offender. These shrubs can, if planted around your tank, provide an effective and decorative thief proof barrier.

Securing your oil tank

Following on from the defensive planting tactic, fences and walls can also make life difficult for the thief. A wooden or metal fence, trellis or wall can give significant protection to the tank but it must be remembered that the oil tanker driver will need access to fill the tank. A metal grill or cage with a lockable access point across the top of this wall or fence can further improve security. The wall or fence should be as close to the tank and as high as possible.

Closed circuit television

The use of CCTV as a crime prevention and detection tool has grown massively in recent years. It could play a part in the protection of oil tanks but before you spend lots of money on equipment make an assessment of your needs.

Ask yourself:

1. What do I hope to achieve by using CCTV?
2. How much am I prepared to spend?
3. Is there a reasonable level of light where the cameras will be operating or do I need to think about using cameras with low light capability? (Most thefts take place at night).
4. What am I going to record the captured images on? Digital recording is best.
5. How am I going to provide the Police with any evidence I may capture?

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Telephone: 101
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If you see anything suspicious please report it immediately.